

Embraced in the Heart of the World

“In Him the Universe Holds Together”

Thomas Robinson, *Embraced in God's Fullness* 1, August 12, 2018

Colossians 1:12-20

God delivered us into Jesus' kingdom of love: redemption and forgiveness.

- ¹² ...You are joyfully **giving thanks** to the **Father**, who has **made you sufficient** to receive a portion of the **inheritance** of the saints in **the light**,
¹³ who (God the Father) rescued all of us from the authority of **the darkness** and transferred us into the **kingdom of the Son of his love** (*agapé*),
¹⁴ in whom we have **the deliverance from slavery** (redemption),
the **forgiveness of sins**.

Jesus is the visible Face of God. He gives existence to and embraces all levels of reality.

- ¹⁵ Who (Jesus) is a visible **image** (*eikōn*) of the God who cannot be seen,
firstborn of all creation,
¹⁶ because in him the **universe** was **created**,
things in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or lordships or spheres of rule or authorities –
the **universe** was **created through him** and **for him**.
¹⁷ And he himself is **before all things**,
and in him the universe **holds together**/is embraced.

By his death and resurrection Jesus begins New Creation. He is a New Beginning.

- ¹⁸ And he himself is the **head** of the body, the church (*ekklesia*),
who is the **beginning**,
firstborn from among the dead,
in order that **in all things** he himself may mark a new start,

In Jesus' death, God's Fullness reconciled all of creation into Jesus.

- ¹⁹ because in him all **the Fullness** (*pleroma*) was pleased to dwell,
²⁰ and through him to **reconcile the universe into him**,
whether things on the earth, or things in the heavens
since he had **made peace** through the **blood of his cross**.

I Corinthians 15:25

²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

John 1:1-5, 14, 18

¹ In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ...

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ...

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Letter to a New Church: Who are We, You and I?

Paul is pacing up and down in prison (with Aristarchus, probably in Ephesus). He's writing to believers he's never met, a church taught by his co-worker Epaphras in the city of Colossae east of Ephesus, close to other cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. Paul has been dealing with crises in Ephesus (2Cor 2:8-10) and in Corinth and Galatia. He is sending this letter to a Gentile community, by Tychicus ("Lucky") and Onesimus ("Useful"), an escaped slave, now a believer, returning to Philemon, who is part of the community. A lot at stake.

Paul could write some simple encouragements and instructions as an apostle. He does encourage and instruct, but there's nothing superficial about Colossians.

These people have entered a major life-change by committing their lives to Jesus. From Roman/Greek culture, they are trusting their existence to a "Messiah" (anointed king) crucified by the Romans, whose story flows from Israel and Abraham. But more, this Jesus was the very presence of the One God of the universe, killed by humans!

Paul wants to lead them deeper into lives of love & gratitude, but not just as his good advice. He wants them to see this life as part of God's history with Israel and all people in Jesus. Indeed this truth is the core of the whole universe, uniting the spiritual & the physical. All our alienations, injustices, and sins, work against God's great work of reconciliation.

Finding ourselves in a Personal Universe – an Embracing Creator

In our text Paul is reflecting on how joy and thanksgiving have broken out among these Gentiles. They've joined Jews like Paul in experiencing God's deliverance from slavery, from an authority that engulfed them in darkness, deception, broken human life.

God brought them into light in Jesus, who embodies his love. The light of Jesus' love revealed the slavery that sin trapped them in. He broke sin's power by redemption & forgiveness.

Jesus could do this even for Gentiles/nations because he is the unique bond between God's invisible spiritual reality and the whole visible physical world in all its complexity – the universe (*ta panta*). He is God becoming part of his own visible creation, as "image." He is "firstborn" the bringer of God's life into creation as creator and as incarnation.

It is "in him" that creation takes place and "in him" that the universe continues to exist. He is God's personal embrace, holding together all aspects of creation by his love. The physical world is rational, discoverable, unified by its creator and sustainer's embrace.

Finding ourselves in Life and Death – the Reach of Jesus' Embrace

But in human existence, the physics and biology of the world are not usually the focus of everyday life. We struggle with our conscience and consciousness that we are broken, messed up, fearful, dying. Our moral sense and wide-ranging consciousness cause us to see not only the beauty of the world, but our injustice, selfishness, hurt, rebellion, sin.

In Jesus, God not only unites the physical and spiritual, God also brings his identity as creator of life into the deepest suffering of humanity in death. Jesus is "Beginning" in a new, ultimate sense for humans: He begins the creation of life that conquers death, through death and resurrection. Jesus is "firstborn" of this new creation – then He invites us in.

Here the "Fullness" of God finds full expression. His love breaks through our deepest pain. He goes to the bottom of alienation and reconciles the whole created universe into Jesus. This is the vision from which the Colossians and we learn love and gratitude and growth.